



ELSAH HISTORY

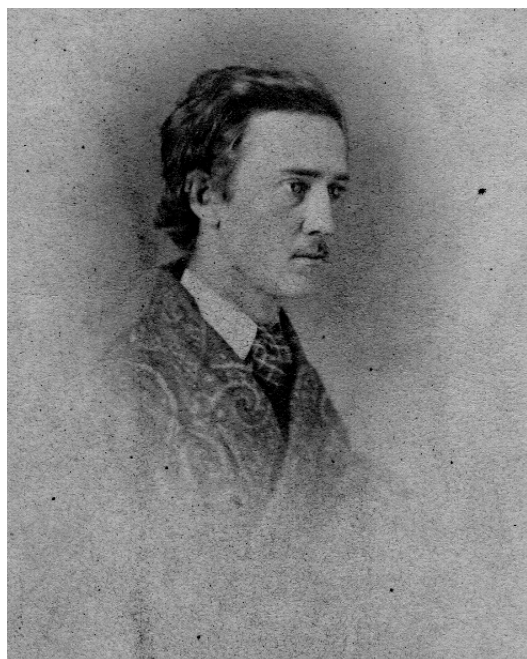
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The Semples of Elsie: Part II, 1861-1865

By George Provenzano, PhD



Siblings Eugene Semple, circa 1870s, and Julia Semple Scott, circa 1860s-1870s. Courtesy of the University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections [UW 40183/UW 40187].

This article is the second of three about the lives of James and Mary Semple, their children, and other family members in Elsie in the years before, during, and after the Civil War. Part II covers the four-year period during the war itself. Part III, to be published in the Spring 2021 issue, will deal with the years of Reconstruction to 1876.

In November 1860, the election of Abraham Lincoln as 16th president of the United States set in motion a cascade of momentous events. The southern states seceded from the Union, formed a separate Confederate nation with its own army and attacked Fort Sumter, propelling the United States into a civil war.

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In Elsah and Jersey County, General James Semple and most other men—women not yet having suffrage—voted against Lincoln. Based on declarations made the previous summer during the Republican Convention in Chicago, Semple, like many in southwestern Illinois, regarded Lincoln's policy of blocking the extension of slavery into the territories as divisive sectionalism. They thought his political stance glorified the North and debased the South.

James Semple did not own any slaves himself, but two of his sons-in-law and several other family members and friends did. Having grown up in Kentucky, Semple knew firsthand of the economic importance of slave labor, particularly in the South. As a practicing attorney, Semple also knew the laws that treated an entire category of persons as pieces of property rather than as human beings having civil rights enabling them to determine their own destinies.

Unlike Lincoln, Semple did not believe the practice of slavery was immoral or incompatible with continued settlement of the West. More importantly, Semple was convinced the U.S. Constitution gave individual states—not the federal government—the legal responsibility to decide whether owning slaves was permissible or not. Consequently, Semple and most other Jersey County voters concluded Lincoln was not a unifying agent in a nation on the edge of agitation over the issue of extending slavery, and so they cast their ballots for the Democrat, Senator Stephen Douglass, by an overwhelming majority.

In St. Louis, General Semple's only son, Eugene, was now 20 and aspired to be a lawyer like his father. Young Semple had left Elsah for St. Louis two years earlier. As an ambitious young man, he eschewed country living and farming and as such rejected his father's example of becoming a country lawyer and large landowner who rented

his holdings to dozens of tenant farmers. Therefore, after attending St. Louis University for two years, Eugene began reading law at one of the more prominent law firms in the city.

Having married the previous June, the Semples' daughter Lucy and her husband Edgar Ames had moved into their own home in one of St. Louis' more fashionable neighborhoods. Lucy was expecting the couple's first child. Edgar's financial success in meat-packing and real estate permitted hiring two Irish-born, domestic servants to manage household chores. Edgar also owned one slave, a bi-racial male, age 13.



Ada Semple Ames, Lucy's daughter, as a young girl. Courtesy of the University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections [UW 40185].

In 1860, three other individuals with close family ties to the Semples also resided in St. Louis: son-in-law and widower, Napoleon Mulliken; and Mary and Ruth Burns, African-American sisters who had been domestic servants at Trevue, the name of the Semple family home in Elsah. Napoleon had married the Semples' eldest daughter Ada on Christmas Day 1854. Ruth Burns

accompanied the newlyweds to their St. Louis residence where she worked as a waiting maid. Ruth continued to work for Napoleon after Ada died in 1858. Mary departed the Semple household a few years later to work as a maid in the St. Louis home of Theo Betts and his wife. Betts was Semple's business acquaintance.

Napoleon was quite wealthy. He was part owner of a small fleet of packet boats—steamboats with paddle wheels on the side rather than in the rear—that ran daily from St. Louis to Alton and on to Keokuk, Iowa. Elsah was a regular stopping place. The boilermakers, deck hands, cooks and stewards on Napoleon's boats were slaves. When Napoleon's wife died in 1858, the couple's only child was adopted by his Semple grandparents and taken to Elsah. Unfortunately, the child was in poor health and died there in 1861. Despite these losses, Napoleon remained close to the Semples. He visited them regularly and often chaperoned their youngest daughter Julia to balls and other social gatherings in St. Louis.

Before moving to St. Louis, Mary and Ruth Burns had been members of the Semple household since the mid-1840s. The girls were born in Madison County, Illinois, in the mid 1830's and were 'free colored'. When they became adolescents, their mother agreed to indentures of apprenticeship with General Semple for them to learn the domestic arts of cooking, sewing, and housekeeping. General Semple knew Mary and Ruth Burns' mother when she 'belonged' (was a slave) to his parents in Kentucky. However, there is no evidence this woman was ever Semple's slave in Kentucky or Illinois. Under Illinois law concerning apprentices, any minor child could be 'bound out' in an indenture agreement for apprenticeship regardless of his or her race. Under the first Illinois Constitution, only African-American children of slaves or indentures who

resided in Illinois before it became a state in December 1818 could be 'bound out' as indentured servants. Indenture agreements for apprentices and servants both lasted until age 18 for females and age 21 for males.

As more states seceded, pro-Union sentiment prevailed in Illinois even among Democrats who were against abolishing slavery. Semple was in this category. Despite his Kentucky background, he was against Illinois leaving the Union. On the opposite side of the Mississippi River, Missouri was a slave state. In March 1861, an elected constitutional convention considered but voted down seceding. In St. Louis—where Semple's son Eugene and married daughter Lucy lived—many public leaders were southern sympathizers who favored secession. Thus, for the Semples of Elsah began four years of uncertain living during a civil war.

Following the Confederate occupation of Fort Sumter in April 1861, Illinois Governor Richard Yates, a Republican, received strong support from the Republican-controlled General Assembly to recruit, train and equip militia units in response to President Lincoln's call for volunteers. Although General Semple had volunteered for militia service in the War of 1812, the Blackhawk War, and the Mexican War, at age 61 and living in Elsah, he did not offer his assistance to command Illinois units preparing to put down rebel insurgency. As a Democrat, he would likely been rebuffed had he done so.

In Missouri, southern sympathizers were, naturally, more active. In the months before Fort Sumter and with the approval of Democratic Governor Claiborne Jackson, they organized and armed a separate pro-Confederate militia. On May 10, 1861, a United States Army regiment from Jefferson Barracks arrested a unit of these

secessionists at Camp Jackson just outside St. Louis. As the Army marched the captives into town to release them on parole, violence erupted. Scores of civilians were killed and injured. Several days of rioting followed throughout St. Louis. The violence finally ended with the U.S. Army imposing martial law.

Martial law meant infringements on civil liberties, which were disturbing for young, heady, outspoken Eugene Semple. In particular, he cringed at the idea of having military authorities asking him to take an oath swearing allegiance to the U.S. government, even though he could be barred from practicing law unless he did so.

In early 1862, enforcement of martial law increased restrictions on free speech. This situation became completely intolerable for Eugene. In particular, he objected to an act by General Henry Halleck, who commanded the Union Army in St. Louis, of ‘banishing to Dixie’ St. Louis citizens who were vocal supporters of the Confederacy. Very simply, the Union Army rounded up and in short order placed St. Louisans on steamboats headed down the Mississippi to the South. This practice increased in frequency during 1862 before reaching a peak in the spring of 1863.

By early 1863, Eugene Semple concluded that expressing his views on the conduct of the War would likely land him in Gratiot Street Prison, as it had others who exhibited disloyal behavior. He packed up his belongings and with a friend and fellow lawyer headed to New York for a steamship to the Isthmus of Panama. From the Pacific side he boarded another steamship to San Francisco, finally arriving in July. But San Francisco was only a stopping point until he could travel on to Portland, Oregon. Letters from family

members to Eugene after he left St. Louis are the source of the occurrences described below.

Julia was still a teenager when her brother left for the Northwest. She was very vivacious, full of herself, and absorbed in her social life. With Mary and Ruth Burns working in St. Louis, Julia was the last sibling at home in Elsah, caring for her parents. She was bored at Trevue and wanted more of the excitement of social life in St. Louis, where she went for lengthy visits with Sister Lucy. The War did not seem to figure prominently in her world.

Because of her cooking skills, Ruth Burns had no difficulty finding new employment opportunities outside the Semple family network. For Mary, circumstances were different: she did not care for city living and wanted to return to Elsah to work for James and Mary Semple. For a while, Mary stayed with Lucy in St. Louis. When Julia visited her sister there in mid-March 1864, she was able to escort Mary back to Elsah.

According to Julia’s letter to Eugene, she and Mary took the packet boat from St. Louis. The weather was very cold. Julia met some friends and went inside with them. Mary remained outside on deck, as may have been the custom. The five-hour travel time for a steamboat going upriver exposed Mary to air temperatures close to those of the river that only weeks before had shed its icy winter skin. She contracted a severe case of lung fever—the 19th century term for pneumonia—and died two days later at Trevue. Julia was heartbroken.

The prosecution of the Civil War was the main newsworthy event in St. Louis and in Elsah. General Semple closely monitored war politics as well as military events. Lincoln’s 1863 Emancipation Proclamation and the prolonged bloodshed and expense of the War were not

popular in southwestern Illinois, and although Semple stuck to his roots in the Democratic Party, there is no evidence he became an active supporter of the Confederacy or a Carpetbagger.

When the War started, Semple was a Peace Democrat; he wanted restoration of the Union but with recognition of the southern states' right to govern themselves, including preserving slavery, as they had previously under the U.S. Constitution. As the War progressed, Semple turned toward favoring the negotiation of a peace agreement with the South, an idea that gained considerable public attention in the Midwest. In mid-June 1863, Semple attended the Illinois Democratic Party's peace conference in Springfield. Lucy wrote to her brother, "Pa went to the Democratic meeting in Springfield. They say there was 100,000 [One Springfield newspaper estimated 40,000] people there, and they expected to scare Abe Lincoln to death." A few weeks later on July 3, after monumental Union victories at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, and Vicksburg, Mississippi, interest in the peace movement faded away.



*Henry Semple Ames, Lucy's son, as a boy, circa 1860.
Courtesy of the University of Washington Libraries,
Special Collections [UW 40186]*

The Semples at Christmas, 1864

By the winter of 1864, most Civil War military action was in the East. Missouri remained under martial law. In St. Louis and along the Mississippi River to Elsie, civilians were subject to arrest for speaking out against the Union War effort. Despite these inconveniences, the Semples visited their daughter Lucy, her husband Edgar, and their grandchildren for a joyful family Christmas.

Julia wrote to her brother Eugene the following account of Christmas Day, 1864,

"There were a great many presents given here. Sister Lucy got a silver pickle stand from Bel, a silver cheese knife from Aunt Mack, coffee spoons from Mr. Ben Woodruff, a young gentleman staying here, carving stand from Cousin Sallie, and silver fish knife and fork from me. *I* got a very elegant jewel case from Napoleon, a photograph album from Ben, set of point lace from Sister Bel, a handsome silk dress from Lucy, also silk from Ma, besides boxes of candy too numerous to mention. Sister Lute (Lucy) gave Pa a handsome morning gown and Ma an India shawl. Bel gave Ma a solid gold belt buckle. We all wished you had not been so far off as we could have sent you a box of home presents.

The weather is very mild and pleasant today. It seem(ed) like spring. I only hope it will be so New Years.

Ada and Henry enjoyed opening their stockings very much this morning; it was so amusing to see them."

Like many families from southwestern Illinois, the Semples had members who fought on opposite sides during the Civil War. There is no evidence Semple provided material support or engaged in outward display of loyalty for the Confederacy. He did, however, show disdain for men who wore a Union uniform, even if they were family members. In spring 1864, Mary Semple's rich nephew from the East, Colonel Henry Rutgers Mizner, visited Trevue on his way to join General Sherman for the Atlanta campaign. Julia wrote to Eugene that the colonel was, "...a nice man, but Pa did not like him... because he had on the Yankee uniform."

In July 1864, the Democrats nominated former Union commander General George McClellan as their candidate to run against Lincoln for president. Because the war had dragged on with great loss of life and no apparent end, Lincoln thought his election prospects were dim. James Semple thought otherwise. The veteran politician told daughter Julia, "'Little Mc,' is nominated; hurrah for him—but there is not much hope of his being elected."

Lincoln's electoral fortunes improved dramatically after General William Tecumseh Sherman captured Atlanta in September 1864. Nonetheless, Semple maintained his loyalty to the Democratic Party and voted for McClellan, who won more votes in Jersey County than Douglass had in 1860.

In spring 1865, the superior numbers of men in the Union Army and abundant resources of the North finally subdued the dwindling forces of the South. Although victory for the North became inevitable, there was great uncertainty on what the end of the war meant for the states that had seceded. The general public did not really know whether these states were to be readmitted to the Union, and if they were, how would it be accomplished.

General Semple expressed this uncertainty in a letter to Eugene written on May 15, 1865, six weeks after Lee's surrender at Appomattox and one month after the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln. Semple wrote,

"So far as we can see things on the surface, the South seems to be completely washed out, but whether there is anything under this, no one can tell. The murder of Lincoln, while it was certainly a monstrous crime, was at the same time, in my opinion, most disastrous to the country, for I had somehow got it firmly in my mind that Lincoln would have some way or other settled up this whole matter, and restored peace. But we know not what Johnson may do."

The bitter War Between the States had ended, but for the Semples in Elsah, their son in Portland, Oregon, and daughter, son-in-law, and grandchildren in St. Louis, the uncertainty of Reconstruction had just begun.

Dr. George Provenzano is an economist with over 50 years of experience in research and teaching in academia, including at the University of Illinois, Urbana; the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency; and Battelle Memorial Institute in the private sector. Since retiring in 2006, he has done extensive research and speaking on local Riverbend history.

Elsah Eyes its Natural Heritage: Wetland Restoration Project

By Cecily Lee, DML

Ask someone what makes Elsah Village unique, and the answer might be that it's a place where you can "step back in time," free from the clatter and clutter of 21st century life. Elsah's modern-day identity is, in fact, tightly bound up with its historical heritage as an 1850s river town. The effort to preserve the Village in its entirety -- stone housing stock, Village Hall, schoolhouse, Farley's Music Hall, Methodist church, bridges, Ice House and more -- marks it as a community that particularly values its cultural legacy.

But what of Elsah's natural heritage and its preservation? The natural history of the place has, of course, always been there, embedded in the landscape. And Nature's role does show up in the Village narrative -- the Mighty Mississippi as both *raison d'être* and continuing perpetrator of floods; the limestone bluffs as source of building stone; the fertile river silt as enticement to farm. Yet it's the man-made structures and those who inhabit them that have largely captured the camera's eye and chronicler's pen here, with Nature relegated to the background, literally and figuratively.

There's a change in the wind, though. Elsah appears to be seeing its natural environs with new eyes. It is considering whether the demure natural "backdrop" might be an untapped additional resource in attracting the stream of visitors and new residents needed to sustain the continuing life of the Village. In broader terms, as 21st century climate change awareness posits Nature as existential home and sustainer of all species, the

imperative has emerged for local communities like Elsah to take a closer look at how they interact with their natural surroundings.

Elsah is doing just that. Under Mayor Mike Pitchford the Village started a "beautification project" (now "enhancement"), funded by the town government and private donations in 2018. First came landscaping improvements -- tree stumps with vibrant flowers and new berms planted exclusively with native species. Residents volunteered to water and weed these spaces.

Next, new iron benches on hand-laid brick platforms were placed in strategic Nature-viewing spots -- facing the river and creek and near the Ice House. They were a silent invitation to folks to spend more contemplative time with Nature. It turned out to be good timing; people were looking to the out-of-doors as a calming and even inspiring antidote to COVID-derived cabin fever.





Then along came wetland ecologist Jeff DePew, who fortuitously moved to Elsah last April with his wife, Linda Drysdale. Depew brought energy and a vision for taking the town enhancement project to a new level. His experience in teaching at Principia Upper School, Webster University, and Missouri Botanical Garden; working in the field at the Shaw Nature Reserve and in the Caribbean with sea turtles; and engaging in environmental civic action like spearheading the Missouri Department of Conservation's Stream Teams, has equipped him with the expertise to fuel this new green venture-adventure.

"Elsah has a native freshwater wetland already, a unique bottomland. Let's expand it! It's built around a spring-fed stream that runs into the largest river in the continent," DePew exclaims, giant topographical map in hand. Getting down to business, he ticks off the list of what it will take to restore and enhance this fragile ecosystem:

Preserve the large, old growth trees. "They really concern me," DePew says. Many are deprived of nutrition, weighed down and choked by decades-old, uncontrolled grape and other vines, some the size of a trunk.

Replace invasive species with endemic ones. A good deal of cutting and removal of unwelcome species has already been accomplished this year. Wetland-friendly trees being used include cotton wood, river birch, red maple, sycamore, and pawpaw. For ground cover, there's wild carrot, sedge and buttonbush. Some 800 plants, including young trees, were purchased and planted by the Village over the spring and summer. Some village residents are beginning to go native in their own gardens too. In August, resident Kathy Baird received Audubon "Bring Conservation Home" certification for meeting rigorous ecological gardening criteria, including extensive use of native plants.

Improve stream water quality. DePew expects to start regular testing and reporting of Village water quality this spring. He would like to see the Village more actively clamp down on remaining cases of untreated waste runoff going into our



creek. There is also “junk” in the form of old concrete chunks to be removed.

Stabilize the stream bank. The planting done so far by Village volunteers to prevent further bank erosion can be seen on both sides of the Mill Street bridge near Farley’s Music Hall. The areas are fenced and signed.

Contour the land to increase the wetland slue area. This is to allow for greater capture of treated sewage water, as well as runoff rainwater, which will filter directly into the water table. It should help mitigate flooding of the stream as well,



DePew notes. Resident Mike Rhaesa’s prior work on a bog for this purpose is visible today on the Village side of the stream.

Support biodiversity. As endemic plant species flourish and water quality improves, all kinds of animal species can find healthy habitat here. We can expect to see more bats, dragonflies, owls, pollinators, herons, cranes, frogs, minnows, crayfish and snails, DePew observes.

Get residents, visitors and students involved. “Citizen science” and ecological education are all-important to DePew. He would like to see Principia College students actively engaged in the on-going work of nurturing Elsah’s wetland to attain its full natural potential, just as they work

on the prairie grass ecosystems on campus. Guided walks, even moonlight ones, for residents and visitors are part of the vision, as are talks by and partnerships with area scientists and institutions.

Beyond restoration and preservation of the



wetland area *per se*, DePew envisions the whole Village leading by example for the area through adoption of more eco-friendly practices. “If we clean up our water table by using brine instead of salt in winter and give up fertilizers and other chemicals, Elsah could get onto the National Wildlife Federation’s ‘Natural Area Program’ listing. Or we could become a Monarch Watch Site; we’re in the Midwest migration corridor.”

With this fresh breeze of green thinking and action wafting through Elsah, the town is poised to expand preservation efforts beyond its cultural-historical legacy to encompass its precious natural heritage as well. And this greater mindfulness of our natural surroundings is likely to bring with it a wholesome restoration of an ages-old balance.

Dr. Cecily Lee is former Associate Professor of Spanish at Principia College. A resident of Elsah, she currently serves on the HEF Board and as editor of Elsah History.

Maybeck Preservation on Principia College Campus: Radford Hall

By Melody Hauf-Belden

Extensive preservation work on Radford Hall was completed in September, after renovation began last spring. Radford is one of the thirteen original buildings at Principia College, and the only remaining all-wood building, designed by the renowned San Francisco architectural firm of Maybeck & White. Although it is decidedly not a showcase for Bernard R. Maybeck's innovative concrete, stone and brick building techniques, as seen in his better-known large, English country-style "houses" (student dormitories) on campus, Radford still holds all the Maybeckian charm.

Construction of the Principia College campus began in 1931. Between the trials of the Great Depression and local labor disputes, funds to finish the project ran short along the way. Trustees Julia Brown Radford, Minnie Morey Howard and Hazle Buck Ewing stepped up to fund the completion of the buildings as planned in 1935.

Among her numerous donations, Julia Brown Radford, of Kirkwood, Missouri, included funding for a pair of identical "temporary" buildings: George A. Radford Hall and Julia Brown Hall, built in 1934-35. These California style Maybeckian, small, all-wood, shingle clad buildings were the last drawn up specifically by



Maybeck and erected just before the first students arrived on campus in the winter of 1935. Radford and

Brown had an indispensable function, housing four faculty offices and the six small classrooms needed for subjects other than arts and sciences in the College's early years.

In 1953, Radford was moved from its original location near the present-day College concourse, Howard Center, to its current site near Buck House. Brown, its twin, was razed in 1981. Over the years, Radford has housed classrooms, offices, a bookstore, art gallery, woodshop and more. The 85 year-old *temporary building* is now considered a key building for Principia's Historic Landmark standing. Hence the investment in preservation.

The Principia Structural Trades and Landscape Crew performed these exterior renovations: all new exterior shingle siding, one new door, re-constructed wood stairs/landings, new areas of asphalt, all new concrete pathways, extended roof drainage, improved site drainage, stabilized site grading, and cleaned up landscaping.



Melody Hauf-Belden is the Principia Archivist and Special Collections librarian at Principia College, Elsah, IL, and currently serves on the HEF board.

Digging up the Story of the Elsay Free Library

By Jane Pfeifer

While the Kibbe photographic image of the Elsay Free Library may be iconic, information about the library itself is scarce. When Deborah Smith, owner of the building at 10 Selma Street where the library was located, asked me when and how long it was housed there, I had no idea. However, I did recall being told that the Elsay Free Library



Elsah Free Library, circa 1940, by Eugene Kibbe. Courtesy of the Principia Archives.

was a Leonard family project. Edwin S. Leonard was a faculty member and Dean of the College, and Gladys, his wife, was a staff member at Principia College. While I knew that their son, Edwin Deane Leonard, was a life member of Historic Elsay Foundation and a Principia College graduate (1950), I did not know him personally. So, I asked his sister, Dawn Leonard Larmer, former Chief Executive Officer of Principia, whom I did know, about it.



Present day Mill St. side of 10 Selma Street residence, location of 1938-39 Elsay Free Library.

According to Edwin Deane Leonard and Dawn Leonard Larmer, in 1939 the Elsay Free Library was in existence in the back portion of 10 Selma Street for about a year. The entrance was on Mill Street. The library's existence was reported in the *Elsah Blah*, a local newspaper whose general manager was Deane Leonard himself, a 9-year-old at the time. Deane also started the Elsay Free Library. Both of these enterprises benefited from the help of Deane's parents and siblings, as well as Principia College students.

The Elsay Free library was open only a few hours a week, "Monday, Wednesday and Friday from four to five-thirty," according to the *Elsah Blah*. The May 16, 1939 issue of the paper tells us that Principia College students were involved. It reported, "Under the leadership of Juanita Williams and Ruth Foote, the girls have raised money to build bookshelves along one side of the room. They hired Mr. Repke to build the shelves,..."

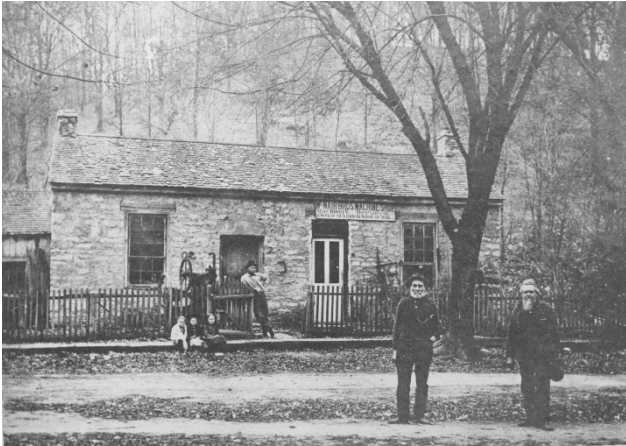
Then came a move. The Elsay Free Library was taken up Selma Street to the McDow House, also called the Union Hotel in *Elsah: An Historic Guidebook* by Paul O. Williams and Charles B. Hosmer. Miss Lucy McDow became the librarian of the Elsay Free Library. According to her niece, Nancy McDow, the library in the new location did not last very long. Edwin Deane Leonard donated a copy of the complete set of the *Elsah Blah* to

Historic Elsay Foundation. We will scan the pages so that we have easy access to the contents. If any reader has further information on the history of the library, kindly send it to Historic Elsay Foundation.

Jane Pfeifer is a life member of Historic Elsay Foundation and serves on the HEF board. She was appointed to serve a term on the Illinois Historic Sites Advisory Council as a preservation advocate.

McNair Family reconnects

This autumn, Elsay Museum and the Principia Archives were thrilled to hear from a branch of the descendants of the McNair family regarding their family history and diaries housed in the Principia Archives. The McNairs were an active family in Elsay during the mid-1800s through mid-1900s.



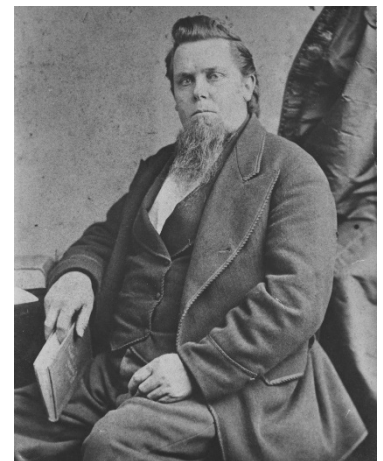
McNair's at the Machine Shop, Elsay IL, circa 1900. Courtesy of the Principia Archives.

They played a vital part in a bustling Elsay as builders, inventors, and jacks-of-all-trades, working on construction projects from the mill and distillery to homes and farm buildings. A couple of fine examples of their craftsmanship are still standing in today's Elsay: the McNair brick home at 66 Mill St. and the neighboring stone

building at 62 Mill Street that housed their machine shop. They were also major contributors to the building of the Elsay Methodist Church.

Founding members of Historic Elsay Foundation Dr. Charles B. Hosmer Jr. and Paul O. Williams took an interest in the McNair family history, writing about them in their co-authored first edition of *Elsah: A Historic Guidebook*. Williams also wrote *The McNairs of Elsay, Illinois: Uncommon Common Men*, an HEF historical publication viewable at <https://archive.org>.

We are looking forward to a post-COVID time when the McNair descendants can visit Elsay, search through the collection of diaries and discover more about their family history.



William McNair, c. 1900. Courtesy of the Principia Archives, donor: Beulah Carpenter.

Historic Elsay Foundation News

HEF's first Holiday Online Auction

Historic Elsay Foundation is delighted to have initiated a new fundraising activity this year -- its first ever *Holiday Online Auction* -- held Dec. 2-5. By all accounts, it was a success. HEF President Donna DeWeese spearheaded the event, contacting many area businesses to invite them to donate. Board members Jon Hosmer and Jeff Cornelius set up the auction on the online bidding site, BiddingOwl.com, and Melody Hauf promoted the event on social media with the help of new board member Colleen Turkal. Abigail DeWeese also volunteered. Many thanks to all!

Seventy-six donations were received, including ones from Elsay -- *Maple Leaf Cottage Inn, Peace Works, Elsay General Store, Elsay Galleries, Little Barn Floral Design and Photography Gallery, Green Tree Inn, Crocker and Springer,*



Three Rivers Community Farm, Jane Pfeifer, Duncan Martin, Sun Smith-Foret, and Phoenix Czarnik. Businesses and artists from Alton, Godfrey and Grafton also contributed.

Our heartfelt appreciation goes to all those businesses and individuals who so generously donated items, gift certificates for services and works of art for auction, as well as the many people who made bids and purchases. All proceeds will help Historic Elsay Foundation continue its work on behalf of the Village of Elsay.

Hosmer-Williams Lecture Series – First lectures given via Zoom



On September 17th, a Hosmer-Williams lecture titled "The Lady Major and the War Governor: Belle Reynolds and Richard Yates, and the Politics of a Civil War Sex Scandal" was given by A. James Fuller, Professor of History at The University of Indianapolis. Fuller offered an insightful look at a lesser known but nonetheless colorful event, and the manner in which the story was reported by the press, depending on the political slant of each newspaper.

A second talk in our Hosmer-Williams Lecture Series was given by Ian Hunt, Chief of Acquisitions at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield, Illinois, on November 12th. Sponsored by Liberty Bank, this lecture was titled, "Rediscovering Lincoln's Bible – A Gift from the Ladies of the Philadelphia Volunteer Hospital Association." Mr. Hunt gave his audience a fascinating look into how carefully



Lincoln's Bible had been cared for and preserved by the descendants of Reverend Noyes W. Miner, a close friend of Abraham Lincoln. Noyes received the Bible as a gift from Mary Lincoln several years after the President's death.

Both Fuller's and Hunt's lectures were highly interesting and informative. But they were notable for another reason, namely, they were not given in Farley's Music Hall. For the very first time, Historic Elsie Foundation hosted the Lecture Series as in an online format, through the Zoom platform. This was done, of course, because of the health concerns related to large crowds gathering during the pandemic. As with any interruption of the normal routine, there is often a silver lining. Ours was discovering the ability to reach an audience from a wider geographic area. Thanks go to HEF Board member George Provenzano for arranging and hosting these two lectures. Stay on the lookout for our 2021 lecture dates at www.historicelsah.org.

Elsie Museum Painted

The Elsie Museum, operated by Historic Elsie Foundation, is filled with historic treasures that give guests a well-documented look at Elsie, dating back to its earliest days. The museum is inside a building known for many years as the Village Hall (constructed in 1885), which is currently owned and maintained by the Village of Elsie. Seizing on some beautiful October weather, village maintenance engineer Randy

Greding gave the façade, sign and shutters of the museum a facelift with a fresh coat of paint. HEF is grateful for the commitment shown by everyone in the Village to help preserve Elsie's historic significance, charm, and beauty. The museum is closed for the winter but will reopen in early April, Saturdays and Sundays, 1 – 4 pm.



Donations to Historic Elsie Foundation

This newsletter is the 117th in the *Elsie History* series, dating back to the 1970s when HEF was first chartered. It is one of the important activities contributing to historic education on and preservation of the buildings and character of the Village of Elsie. Besides fundraisers and annual memberships, we rely on the generous donations of those who understand the value of this vital work. Please consider making a donation to HEF and, if you are not already a member, we do hope you will join. Your help is especially needed this year! See page 16 or visit our website for how to donate or join. www.historicelsah.org/donate



IHLC Collecting Illinois COVID-19 Stories: Do You Have One?

Home for the Holidays 2020 cancelled

We are saddened that Historic Elsay Foundation's annual *Home for the Holiday House Tour* had to be cancelled this year, due to pandemic-related health and safety considerations. But we are already looking forward to next year's house tour, so mark your calendars for Saturday, December 4, 2021.



The Illinois History and Lincoln Collections (IHLC), a unit of the University of Illinois Library, is collecting materials that capture Illinoisans' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their goal is to preserve this history and make it available for future researchers to better understand this unprecedented period.

IHLC is seeking a range of submissions including stories, journal and diary entries, letters, emails, photographs, video and audio recordings, and other digital submissions that reflect people's thoughts and experiences during the current pandemic. The form for submitting materials is at <https://go.library.illinois.edu/IHLCSubmissionFormCOVID-19>. If you prefer, you may submit them to historicelsah@gmail.com. We will gather items received from this area over the next few months and submit them to IHLC.

Claire Weibel of the IHLC unit at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign contacted Historic Elsay Foundation on November 17, 2020, requesting that we share this information with our members.

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HEF Purpose

The purpose of Historic Elsay Foundation as stated in the articles of incorporation (1971) is “...preservation and enhancement of the historic buildings, architecture, and culture of the Village of Elsay, Illinois, and the establishment of an educational program to inform the general public of the historical and educational values of the Village.”

Elsah History Newsletter

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Memberships for 2021

Patron	\$25 to \$99
Supporter	\$100 to \$249
Founder's Circle	\$250 and above
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